

REMARKS OF THE HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, SECOND
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, RHODE ISLAND ON THE AFL-CIO LABOR
DAY PROGRAM OVER WJAR-TV ON SEPTEMBER 7, 1964

Seventy years ago, the Congress of the United States established Labor Day as a national holiday to honor the working people of this country. Both as a member of Congress and as a member of the Bricklayers Union, I deem it a privilege to address the people of Rhode Island on this Labor Day of 1964. It is truly a national holiday -- a time when the whole country shows its appreciation for all those whose hard work has made this the strongest, the most prosperous, and the most technically advanced nation in the world.

In such a great industrial nation as ours, the progress of labor advances the well-being of every citizen. Since its establishment fifty-one years ago, the United States Department of Labor has worked effectively to improve working conditions and advance opportunities for profitable employment for the wage earners of America. And organized labor has always been identified with legislation that has been of benefit to the common welfare of the nation. Such measures as Social

Security, urban redevelopment, minimum wage, and support for medical research have always had labor's backing. Organized labor in America is not simply interested in getting a fair share of the national income for wage earners. Labor cooperates for the common good of the nation and extends its concern to the international level, where it plays a significant part in promoting the cause of peace, good health, and mutual understanding among all nations.

Earlier this year, I was deeply honored when the New England Conference of the International Association of Machinists, AFL-CIO, chose to commend me for what I have been able to do during my twenty-four years in Congress to promote "legislation of benefit to all labor."

I received that award with a profound sense of humility and with gratitude for all that my participation in the labor movement has meant to me. For it was as a laboring man and a union member that I first gained the vision of how we can work together to make this country of ours truly "America

the beautiful," where the ugly stains of poverty, sickness, and ignorance will be wiped out.

The war on poverty is nothing new to me. As a member, and as chairman, of the House sub-committee on appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health, Education, and Welfare, I have been fighting that war for many years. And before I was a member of Congress, I was well acquainted with the practical programs of economic opportunity sponsored by the labor movement.

Contrary to the statements of the junior Senator from Arizona, I know it is a fact that the problem of poverty is not simply one that arises because some people are lacking in a sense of responsibility and the will to work. I do not subscribe to the Goldwater philosophy that the poor are poor because they lack ambition.

Some millions of Americans live in sub-standard conditions today because they are elderly people who are the victims of the failure of our society to develop the kind of

programs for its senior citizens for which I have been working for many years. Other millions are poor simply because various forms of discrimination have denied them the educational and economic opportunities to which they are entitled. Others are poor because of the crushing expense of medical care or because they are mothers who have been deserted and left to bear the responsibility of raising a family.

Yet the fact remains that when all other considerations have been examined, the major cause of poverty is the lack of job opportunities. And the number one long-range domestic problem on this Labor Day of 1964 is the problem of employment for millions now in the work force whose jobs are threatened by automation and jobs for millions more whose lack of skills has made it virtually impossible for them to find work in today's technical world of industry.

The war on poverty is no publicity gag. Those who think it is should ask the four million people -- about 5.7 per cent of the labor force -- who know unemployment in the midst of prosperity. And the war on poverty is no political stunt

to the several million more who can find only part-time jobs.

No, the war on poverty is something which should command the serious attention of all Americans. No one understood this better than the late President John F. Kennedy. And no one understood better than he did that the major battle in the war on poverty must be fought against unemployment. One of President Kennedy's last important public statements touched directly on this point. Speaking before the fifth biennial AFL-CIO convention in New York last November 15th, he said:

"No one gains from a fair employment practice bill if there is no employment to be had...no one gains from attending a better school if he doesn't have a job after graduation...no one thinks much of the right to own a good home, or to sleep in a good hotel, or to go to the theatre, if he has no work and no money."

Now, those of us who have been close to the problem of employment in an automated society know that the solution

is not going to come by the application of some easy little formula. It is not simply a matter of attracting industries; nor of creating what some call a 'favorable climate for business' -- by which they sometimes mean lower wages and less social security for labor. We are not going to solve the problem of jobs just by pushing up the gross national product, cutting taxes, and encouraging people to take longer vacations, although these measures may help.

If I were to stand here before you and say that I have all the answers to the question of full employment, I would be less than honest. Nobody has all the answers. But I firmly believe that a part of the solution must lie in the area of job retraining and vocational education.

For that reason, I have promoted such programs as those of the Manpower Development and Training Act. Under this legislation, Rhode Island has benefited by having such federally aided projects as the program for training

unemployed persons in South Kingstown High School. Other such retraining programs with which I am happy to have been identified are: the training courses for computing machine programmers at Providence College, the retraining programs at the Vocational Technical School in Providence, and the course for training bank tellers in the Greater Providence area. Even the preliminary reports on the effectiveness of Federal retraining courses showed that seven out of ten unemployed persons who finished the courses found new jobs. As the programs have developed, they have shown an even better percentage in many areas.

As I see it, we have merely begun to scratch the surface in meeting the needs for job retraining and vocational training for the youth who are still in school. Rich as this nation is, it cannot afford the human and economic loss that follows upon a situation in which the labor market is being increasingly filled by victims of automation on the one hand and thousands of untrained school dropouts on the other. Boys and girls who scarcely

know how to read and write are not equipped to compete in the modern industrial world. They can't even take advantage of such training programs as now exist. And adults who lack even the elementary skills of literacy are not likely to benefit from re-training programs unless they can overcome their deficiencies in such fundamentals as reading, writing, and simple arithmetic. It does little good in meeting the unemployment problem to erect modern industrial plants, if those who need jobs do not have the basic educational skills required of the workers who are needed for modern industrial processes.

Every friend of labor today must realize that everything that can be done to strengthen the cause of equal educational opportunities is important in the battle against unemployment. Of course, this applies to vocational education especially, but it also applies to education at every level. The working people of this country have a right to expect that their children will have every opportunity to get the benefits of college and university courses in an age

when more and more jobs demand qualified college graduates.

I feel that in my efforts on behalf of the loan provisions of the National Defense Education Act and in my support for the college construction bill, I have been able to make some contribution to the future of working men and their families. I see great promise in such things as the Youth Job Corps, in which over 40,000 young people will be trained for useful work during its first year of operation. But I know that all forms of education are so vital to our future peace, employment, and prosperity that I will continue to lend every effort I can to see to it that we do not neglect any aspect of the educational picture. The war on unemployment is being fought on many fronts, but there is none more important than that which is aimed at overcoming the ignorance which imposes poverty on hundreds of thousands.

This same ignorance and poverty lie behind the terror and violence of the riots that have rocked the streets of some of our largest cities. Even those who claim to be defenders of states rights have been calling for the Federal

government to act in some way to prevent such outbreaks.

Finally, over the opposition of the so-called "conservatives," Congress has acted to wipe out the roots of the problem through the anti-poverty bill, which is a mighty weapon to get at the causes of the disturbances we have experienced this summer. As the distinguished Secretary of Labor recently put it, the violence in our city streets is "less a matter of race than of disadvantage." Productive employment for underprivileged youth may not solve the race problem, but it will go a long way towards righting the wrongs which aggravate it.

The leadership of American labor today is well aware of the scope of its responsibilities. Labor's cause is equally the cause of the things America needs for all of her people: an all-out attack on the problems of environmental health; continued advances in research and education; urban renewal; and a foreign policy which builds strength while it also seeks sane and sensible ways to achieve a greater peace in the world.

On this Labor Day of 1964 we can truly say that labor cooperates with all those who are genuinely interested in the progress of this nation in a manner that is suited to the needs of the second half of the twentieth century.

United in its common determination to go forward, and not backward, American labor will continue to be a powerful, dynamic source of genuine progress. And with labor's energies to strengthen them in their efforts to advance the common good, the American people as a whole cannot fail to insure the continuance of progressive, democratic government. The cause of labor is now, as it always has been, the cause of peace, prosperity, and progress for all America.